

Anchorage School District
Anchorage, Alaska

Summary of Public Hearing on New South Anchorage High School Boundaries
Mears Middle School
February 20, 2003

The third of three Public Hearings to discuss boundaries for the New South Anchorage High School (NSAHS) took place on Thursday, February 20, 2003 at Mears Middle School. Approximately 300 people attended. Mr. Mike Henry, Director of High School education began the meeting at 7:00 p.m. He welcomed parents and explained that the reason for this meeting is to listen to public testimony and also to clarify any misinformation that may exist in the community. He shared that the final decision for these boundaries had not yet happened and that the district is interested in hearing what the public has to say about the possible scenarios presented.

Mr. Henry discussed that a task force was formed to develop possible scenarios for the NSAHS. The task force was appointed by the Superintendent and included parents, students and principals from East, West, Dimond and Service High Schools, representatives from Special Education, the Minority Education Concerns Committee, Anchorage School District (ASD) Transportation and the ASD Demographer. Mr. Henry explained that the task force was guided by the ASD policy 444.1 and considered the capacity of each school as well as the ethnic balance, geographic boundaries, the distance to schools, and future growth projections in determining the possible scenarios.

Mr. Henry explained the task force discovered that in three to five years, there could be 200 – 400 additional high school students in the area. He shared the remodeling of Dimond High School will leave it with a capacity of 1600 students. The NSAHS will also have a capacity of 1600 students, while Service High School will remain at a capacity of 2070 students. The projection is that by the fall of 2004, in all of south Anchorage there will be 4,929 high school students. The combined capacity of the schools compared to the projection leaves room for about 341 students in the area. He stated that the goal of the task force then became to assign students to the three high schools in the area according to school capacity and projections.

The ASD Demographer identified the geographic areas and estimated the number of high school students in each of the “pockets”. The task force then developed scenarios involving the areas currently assigned to the Dimond and Service high schools. It was determined that currently the student populations at East and West high schools are over crowded and that their boundaries would not be affected in the boundaries for the NSAHS. The task force then looked at possibilities and selected two possible scenarios to present to the public.

Mr. Henry described the geographic boundaries of the two scenarios, the projected enrollments and capacity of each school.

Mr. Henry then invited the public to present their testimony, suggested that comments should be kept to about three minutes each person in order to allow everyone time to speak. He shared that comments will be summarized, studied by the task force and then all would be forwarded to the Superintendent who will then make a recommendation to the School Board. He shared that the public will also have the opportunity to speak to the School Board during their meetings on March 3 and March 10, 2003.

A summary of public comments follows:

EJ – Felt the distance requirement fell short. They live in the Southport area and have a daughter that attends Dimond. She would like to recommend that some grandfathering take place, to allow the students to continue attending Dimond.

BK – Is a student at Mears Middle School. She lives 5 minutes from Dimond and has been looking forward to attending Dimond since she was in elementary school. With scenarios A & B, she will be forced to drive 45 minutes to school. She feels both scenarios are unacceptable, and feels that the Bayshore/Dimond community was not represented enough in this decision. We need more time to think on this subject.

HKS – Lives in the Bayshore area. He has two girls who attend Bayshore Elementary. They moved to Anchorage two years ago. He did a lot of research prior to purchasing a home. These changes will have an impact on our children's lives. This could be an impact on property values and for potential buyers.

SG – She is a Service High School single parent of two. She understood the decision to not include East in these boundary discussions. It makes sense to use after renovation capacities for East, Service and Dimond. This is not the case for West High School. There are no major renovations to West in the CIP plans until the year 2005/06. Those plans are not large scale. West is still at 88% capacity. West will not meet the 95% guideline capacity that was used by the task force. Reviewing the boundaries for West could provide some relief of these issues. We assume the Eagle River bonds will be passed. She doesn't understand why it is okay for the Bayshore kids to be bussed long distances when it wasn't okay a few years ago for the military kids to be bussed to Eagle River, or the Eagle River kids to be bussed to Bartlett. She hopes the task force will take the time to reopen the boundary scenarios to include West.

TM – Has two students that will be affected by the boundaries. They live on the hillside in pocket 13. They have one son at Bear Valley and one at Goldenview. This area will be excluded from the new school. Their children have support groups and as they go into high school they would like them to be able to keep that support group. He urges the task force to keep the elementary and middle school boundaries in the forefront in their minds when they redraw the boundaries.

PP – Is a concerned parent who lives in the Bayshore/Southport area. A solution will not be found that will make everyone happy. The main concern of the School Board should

be a quality education. Recently there was a national discussion about the time high school students have to get up to be to school on time. Assuming that schools will still start on time, and the 45 minute bus ride, most students will have to get up considerably earlier to get to school on time. These students will be deprived of valuable sleep. His son lives less than 100 yards away. He will not be able to walk to school. This is wasted time sitting on a school bus. He challenges the committee to consider the kids from Bayshore and Southport area. They will not be able to participate in after school programs. Many of these kids will have after school jobs. They will be getting home too late and will have to get up by 5:00 am.

EL – The process is a little flawed in that a decision is going to have to be made and will go to the School Board by the 3rd of March. He doesn't feel that anyone is in favor of either of the scenarios. Everyone who comes up to speak needs to ask for more time. He feels there are workable scenarios. Scenario B isn't a very good plan. Scenario A is a better scenario, but he feels it is ridiculous for students to be bussed to a school on the hillside when they live right next to Dimond High School.

MG – Live in Bayshore. Have a 5th grader and a 2nd grader. Several years ago the school district put on a presentation at Bayshore. The Dimond High School principal was there with their plans to promote a school and asked the community to pass a bond for a new school in the Bayshore/Southport area. We were misled. Our kids should be able to attend Dimond High School. There is a natural flow to Dimond High. We need more time to analyze this situation. We should not be rushed into anything that we don't think is fair or equitable.

MB – Lives in Bayshore, is a 42-year resident, and graduated from Dimond High School. We need more time. How come the parents were not involved in the task force? Who planned the new Dimond High School to hold 1600 students? This area is being surveyed now for more homes. He wants his kids to go to Dimond. The students will have an hour and a half bus ride per day. After school sports will not be possible. Students who play in the band and have large instruments that cannot be taken on the bus will have to drop band. We need to think this out. Two weeks is not enough time.

It is unfortunate that Dimond High was made smaller. It is unfortunate that the lack of foresight of the powers that be. Why get in such a hurry and lose sight of the students we represent? Students will be penalized. It would be a viable option to let us talk to the School Board. Let the board members make the decision. It is two miles to Dimond and Mears, 7 miles to Service High School. Is the School Board going to take responsibility if students get hurt? The numbers are unrealistic. There are a large number of homes being built. I hope you take our concerns to heart.

PH – Is the parent of two children. One is a 6th grader at Bayshore and has senior at Dimond. If students are bussed to the hillside it will be 35-45 minutes each am and pm. We will have sleep-impaired teenagers. Students will not be able to participate in extra-curricular activities. The driving distance will impact both boundaries for both the Bayshore and Southport families. She is very interested in why our neighborhoods are

being inequitably treated. The roads on the hillside are very icy and dangerous. These proposals are far from family friendly and are going to be very divisive and stressful for families to try to juggle the demands of work and their children's educational development. She is a single parent. She has successful students because she chose to live close to their schools. These proposals will impact the quality of life for her family and their education. It is impossible to get across town during rush hour to be available. We have a close-knit community that we want to encourage and develop. The first proposal splits Campbell Lake. Mears students will not graduate from Dimond. We need to re-evaluate and look at this again.

BP – They have 3 kids in the Bayshore, Mears and Dimond schools. They are not in favor of bussing the kids that are currently attending Dimond anywhere else in the district. There are a lot of other kids who are being bussed long distances because of some arbitrary decision. We are limiting what could be the redistricting area. We should be looking at the whole district. It is a 45-minute ride to the hillside. The sleep loss is an issue. After school activities is a factor. Was a traffic impact study done? Juniors and seniors are going to be new drivers. They will be driving 7 miles to a school on the hillside. If there is a natural disaster the kids will not be able to get home. We need to talk to our representatives. He spoke to Repr. Liesel McGuire. They were not aware of this issue. There is a lot of money being spent and we have a shortfall in the State.

BR – Have an 8th grader and a pre-schooler. These scenarios will make it so the high school student will not be able to be home to watch the younger children. She has a student who plays an instrument that cannot be taken on the bus. She will have to drive the student to school. She would like to see her kids go to Dimond.

KP – Is a representative for the homeowners association. She voiced her concerns at the annual meeting. The association drafted a letter to the School Board and to Carol Comeau. The association has rejected both scenarios. We cannot approve bussing their children 45 minutes to a school. Driving safety is an issue for young drivers. Why did the task force have several months to come up with these scenarios and the public received very little time for comments, objectives and comments? Why were other districts not considered? Three members of the School Board are not up for re-election. We request an extension until October 1, 2003. This extension will give the general public time to request and receive pertinent information from the School Board. It will provide time necessary for the election of the School Board.

MO - Has four children in the district. It is important that we have schools close together. Safety is an issue. If a natural disaster happens kids can walk home. Activities are what keeps kids involved. Activities will have to be eliminated. Her son is a tuba player. He will not be able to ride the bus. Her son attends seminary before school. He will no longer be able to do that. This could affect his religious beliefs. Please consider more time. The task force was given months to develop these scenarios. The public was given very little time. She feels the public input will not be considered.

CR – The Sunday paper had an article regarding the boundaries. Their alliance is to Dimond. This is about community. It is about our children going to school in their community versus going to school in another community. This is about robbing 800 hours of sleep, transportation, and extra-curricular activities. It is about safety. He will have to worry about his children crossing the highway and having to navigate the hillside. It is a time for our family to spend together and to be active in our school. He asked Carol Comeau at a meeting at Dimond why they moved the time up from March 30th to March 10th. Her answer was that the existing School Board is far more familiar with this issue. This School Board was the one to make the decision to make Dimond smaller and put the new high school where the population doesn't exist. Carol asked us to come up with solutions. Leave the old Dimond in place. Leave the portables. Run shifts. With construction staring at Service, he would rather have his kids in portables at Dimond then at Service. Move the boundaries to include all of Anchorage.

RO – Has two daughters at Dimond. Moved to Bayshore 13 years ago. All three schools are close to home. The concept of bussing kids 7 miles is problematic. There will be an additional loss of sleep. His younger daughter is on the swim team. They will loose the camaraderie. Participation is important to keep students out of trouble. Large band instruments are not allowed on the bus. We will loose the sense of family with teachers at Dimond. We have enjoyed the benefits of good teachers. We will have to start from scratch if the kids have to move to a new school. It will be hard to monitor student progress. It is unfortunate to split a child's high school between two different schools. I think the kids who started at Dimond should be able to finish at Dimond. We should consider some of the options of leaving some portions of the old Dimond up. We would much rather have crowded classrooms then have our students on long bus rides.

LS – Has been a teacher at Dimond for 18 years. Her children were raised at Dimond. She has a 9th grader, a 6th grader and a 2nd grader. She feels we need to extend the deadline. She understands that one of the reasons for the push is to have parent volunteers to select the new principal. Some short-term solutions are: Keep options open. Let the Bayshore/Southport students continue at Dimond. Leave the relocatables at Dimond until a more permanent solution can be identified and let the kids that are currently attending Dimond to continue. We need to address a long-term solution. We need to have a vision for this community.

JR – Is a teacher at Dimond and a parent of a student at Bayshore and Mears. We were told that this was the beginning of the boundary process. The process seems to be backwards. She attended the Bayshore PTA meeting in the fall of 1999 to listen to the presentation in regards to Dimond High School. At that meeting they were encouraged to be involved. The design at that time was for 1600 students. At that time there was no mention to lower the capacity. Public input could have been collected for a year. These concerns could have been added to the other information viewed by the task force. She urges the district to look at all concerns. Give them time to look at the information and come up with valid input to bring to the board. She requests a delay until fall of 2003, using all data of using all schools to look at possible alternatives.

LA - Has three children. She requested and received a list of feeder schools. There are nine feeder schools going into Mears. We need to look at the numbers. We can't continue to move children from every elementary school into Mears. We need to evaluate this at the elementary level. We need to stand together as one community as well as one school.

SA – Has 3 kids at Bayshore, Mears and Dimond. She asks that we delay our decision based on the article in the Sunday paper regarding the Eagle River School. It stated that we might have to move all the boundaries. She would ask that this decision be delayed until we know what is going to happen in Eagle River.

LM – Have two children that graduated from Dimond as well as a freshman. Her daughter plays the tuba, which cannot go on the bus. Dimond is a wonderfully ethnic mixed and financially diverse school. She wants her kids at Dimond. It has a huge diverse population. It is a great school to go to, it is a great school to graduate from. She sees a lot of ethnic diversity dropping. They type of people her daughter will be at school with will be the same. She wants to see her daughter with students of other color, other religious beliefs, and different financial groups. This teaches her how to deal with others of different creed, race and color. She doesn't like to see the numbers. Sixteen-percent ethnicity is a huge drop.

PJ – Lives in the Klatt district. Would like to remind the School Board and Carol Comeau that people in the Klatt area has the same concerns as the people in Bayshore and Southport. We will be on the same roads. Their kids will be on the bus as long as those kids are. They want to be included. Her son attends Mears. He will be on the bus a lot longer if he has to go to south Anchorage. Making the decision that East and West boundaries are not accepted may not look or seem like a fair decision. In trying to force numbers into a school that became quite obvious that this is not a good decision.

CJ – When she first looked at the scenarios, it looked like they were taking two schools and dividing them into three. She doesn't feel that this is what the voters decided on. Kids all over town are transported a long way from their homes to a school. They live in the Campbell area. Her daughter goes to West. She has to get up at 6:30 and is sometime at school until 9:30 pm. This is a safety issue. The committee needs to look at all of Anchorage. They live much closer to Service and Dimond. We have a lot of kids that are going through the same thing right now. We need to fix the boundaries all over town not just for Dimond, so all of our kids are safe.

LM – Family moved from Girdwood to Anchorage to be closer to Dimond. Extra curricular activities are important. Time on the bus was approximately 3 hrs a day or 25% of the waking day for four years of high school. Both children excelled at Dimond. They moved to Anchorage because they felt it was important. They will not accept a boundary change that demands that students and families make adjustments. It will be more productive to challenge the process used by the School District to arrive at this position. Questions she would like to see addressed are:

What has been the process? If it is because of the growth on the hillside, redistribute the residents on the hillside to fill the new school. Have they considered the negative impact on students and families in bussing these students? Boundaries should be established to serve children not to fulfill some bureaucrat. Was distance from the school the top criteria? Was distance used to calculate the perspective student enrollment? Prove this. Show us the process. Were the community growth population patterns used to decide on the school size and location? Demonstrate this. How did it come to be that the new school boundaries are so out of wack that the Bayshore students who live adjacent to Dimond will be bussed hours to provide the numbers for the new high school? Where were the parents during this process? Were they brought in and informed with regards of the decision of the size and renovation of Dimond and when were they included? It would appear that the school district is chosen to act in their own interested. It would be her suggestion and we demand that the school district give a clear explanation of their process. They have made a big mistake. Any correspondence in regards to this potential crisis needs to be documented. Keep all your notes, e-mails and keep a paper trail.

KE – Has a pre-schooler and 2nd grader. They live in the Bayshore area. We are to set a good example for our children. What are we setting for them? Use your time efficiently. Use your resources wisely. Community is very important. You need to be involved in your community. Are we teaching our children to get it done just to get it done?

JD – The phrase he as not heard is quality of life. This process began in 1983 when ASD purchased the land that was known as the SE High School. Sometime in 1988 the name got changed to the South Anchorage High School. The boundaries would be south of Abbott and east of the new Seward highway. One of the issues raised in the building design committee meeting on October 20, 21, 1999, quote “this school may be too far from the student population it is supposed to serve. It is very close to Service High”. “We moved to the Goldenview to be near its facilities”. The way he looks at it is okay to live in the East High area, the West High area or the Goldenview area, but if you live in the Dimond area, it is too bad. This is wrong. We have two choices. If Scenario B is chosen he’s not moving and his kids are not going to Service. He received an e-mail from Mr. Henry that states that in 2004 there will be the need for 36 relos at Service. That means that some of our children, who are at relos at Dimond, will most likely be in that same relo at Service. Dimond and Old Service have 51,107 vehicles per day, second to Tudor. Why would you put 5-8 school busses on Dimond Blvd? West High is 6.3 miles from Mears. Either of these scenarios means that we drive 28 miles a day. How many studies of long bus rides did the committee look at before they came up with these scenarios? The longer the bus ride, the lower the academic score. Time on the bus is empty time. The School Board has a bond issue for a new administration building. When asked why they need a new administration building, it was told that their employees spend too much time in their vehicles and their time is too important to drive from meeting to meeting so we have to have a consolidated location. He wants to know why his children don’t have the same rights.

MA – Lives in the Bayshore/Southport area. We have been told to come up with solutions. Ask to give more time. She grew up in the East area. Thirteen years ago her

family moved to the Dimond area. She envied the kids from Dimond because they had a strong community. The east side of Anchorage has a very transient community. Dimond High has the largest alumni in the entire state. We can come up with a better solution. Contact your legislators.

CB – Lived in the Bayshore area since 1975. Grew up in the Dimond area. Graduated from Dimond High School. She feels her kids are going to be ripped from the same opportunity. We have a strong community. Having their friends going to different schools and to have to meet new people is very scary. Ask this board, this community and this panel to let us have more time. Scrap these scenarios. Look at all of Anchorage. Look at all of the boundaries. One issue that has not been looked at is the special needs kids. She has two special needs kids. Change is hard for these kids. It will be difficult for these kids to spend that much time on the bus. Asks that the committee consider taking away the boundaries. Keep the Dimond community in tact.

Resident of Southport. They moved from the Valley 3 years ago. This will affect the quality of life. Three scenarios were developed, two are presented. What was the 3rd scenario? This is a short amount of time.

AM – Son graduated from Dimond last year. Has a sophomore this year. She likes the pebble and pond approach, where you drop the pebble and it goes outward and you look at the people in that area. They built the new school in the most south most part where there is no population. She feels the owners of the land sold the school district a bill of goods. There is dense housing going next to Bayshore. There is lot of enormous building plans going on in this district. She urges the school district and School Board to look to the future. Look at the children at the elementary school, and middle school. Let's get a good flow of the community and what is good for the whole district.

DB – Bought a house in the Dimond area last June. We live one mile from Dimond. Her kids want to go to Dimond.

BG – She is a student at Dimond. Her siblings went to Dimond. She has been waiting to go to Dimond since elementary school. Another issue is driving. They will be driving 7 miles from their home. Students don't always have the best driving record.

PR – Is a 2nd grade teacher at Bayshore Elementary. When she first looked at the scenarios, the first thing she thought of is that it is breaking up the strength at Dimond, the diversity and socio-economics. This has strengthened her children. Her daughter is attending college in Minnesota. She keeps stating that growing up in the Dimond area has made her a better adult. She feels that too many decisions have been made in this district based on statistics. We need to look at the value each child holds. We need to bring them up to be the best adults they can be.

PG – We need more time. Where are the School Board meetings being held? Mr. Henry stated that they are held at 4600 DeBarr Road.

ML – Has four kids, two in Dimond, and two in elementary. They have lived in the Dimond area for a long time. He is a Dimond graduate. Need to look at the feeder school system. We need to keep the students together as much as possible. Projections show 100% occupancy. Middle schools show that Goldenview and Hanshew will be at 85%, but Mears will be at 115%. There is a big oversight. The middle schools have not been looked at. We need to bring in West High and East High. We need to focus on Mears going to Dimond; Hanshew to Service and Goldenview feed into the new South Anchorage High School. We will have a better quality of life. If we can keep them together through this process everyone would be much happier.

CB – Is a new student at Dimond and involved with the peer committee at. Driving this far is unsafe. She is involved in school activities. It will be difficult for her to be involved if she has to drive that far.

Freshmen at Dimond. No one is in favor of these plans. Everyone wants a new plan. Schools will be split up. This will mess up the team spirit. Should keep the schools the same. The students that live on the border now will have to go to Service. This doesn't make much sense.

AC – Is the parent of seven children. Three of them attend Dimond. If the students are moved out of the Dimond area, her older children will not be able to watch the younger children. She can watch her children walk to school. This is a safety issue. Too much time will be spent on the bus. Let's be realistic and use common sense.

DE – Haven't heard anyone mention the building and the school. Looking at the proposed percentages. With all the new housing being built we have to look ahead and build a new school. In looking at the map there is a blank spot at the curve of O'Malley and Minnesota. It needs to go on record that the school district should consider buying the land and plan now for a school. It may be 10 to 12 years ahead but it has to be planned ahead and not after we are at 120% capacity.

Mr. Henry thanked everyone for their input. And indicated that their comments will be taken into consideration.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00.